



Celebration of Male Friendship in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*: A Reader's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to factor out the relationship between male characters in Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner*. The story stands upon various forms of friendship between the characters like Amir and Hassan, Amir and Baba, Amir and Rahim Khan, Baba and Hassan etc. etc. The study is also an appreciation on the novelist's craftsmanship in glorifying friendship over anything which challenges human relationship through his mastery in story-telling. The interpretation of the novel as attempted in this paper is through the perspective of a reader.

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1. Introduction

The Kite Runner is the debutant work of the Afghan-American novelist and Philanthropist, Amir Hosseini. The story of the novel begins with the peaceful life of Afghans before Russia invades and takes the control over Afghanistan. The latter part of the story chronicles the crises faced by those peace loving people after the decline of their nation. The novel stands upon several subject matters include violence, immigration, ethnic clash, political chaos, poverty, religion, identity crisis etc. There is another theme which offers a unique lens to the readers to look at the novel through it, is the different forms of friendship between the male characters. The present paper is an attempt to do the same i.e. to carry out a descriptive study on the thread of male friendship as portrayed by the novelist.



2. Discussion

The major and most talked about themes of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* ranges from violence, immigration, ethnic clash, political chaos, poverty, religion, identity crisis etc. However, an important essence of the novel which stands out against all those themes yet less celebrated is the thread of male friendship. Hosseini's pen-picture of friendship between multiple male characters, indeed, keeps the readers engaged throughout the novel. Infact, it is through this subject matter that helped the novelist successfully express his thoughts and emotion on the aforementioned themes. The finest instance of male friendship in the novel is between Amir and Hassan. They belong to two different classes of society. The former born to a rich Afghan man while the latter is the son of Ali, the servant of Amir's father. Moreover, Hassan belongs to 'Hazara' community, a low caste Muslim of Afghanistan. These differences, however, lose to the strong bond between the two boys, specifically Hassan's loyalty towards Amir is ever firm, secured and unbeatable by any sort of energy under the sky. Amir goes to school and loves reading story books and Hassan would help the former with dressing up every morning. As soon as Amir returns from school, they would go out together and hand themselves over to their own world constellated by the strong friendship. They would sit for hours under the trees in the orchards and Amir would share the new lesson and stories he had read with Hassan. The latter, in return, repays his due by showing his loyalty and doing things for his friend even if the task demands his own dignity and life itself. When it comes to do anything for his friend Hassan would say:

"For you a thousand times over!" (The Kite Runner, 63)

The friendship between the two boys had been put on test on several occasion, however. One such instance is when Amir wins the kite running competition. He wanted to get the last kite which he cuts down to become the champion and show it to his father as trophy of victory. When Hassan sees that the kite is whirling away with the wind he does not waste any time to sprint along the direction of the flying kite to collect it for Amir. Hassan ensured that he gets the kite for his friend though he was raped by Assef as a punishment for it. Through the tale of between Amir and Hassan, the novelist glorifies the friendship over the barricades of human relationship. The thought is further substantiated when Amir learns that Hassan was the illegal son of his father and a 'half-brother' to him. Their friendship is such a strong that Amir leaves no stone unturned to rediscover Hassan's never acknowledged identity by adopting his son Sohrab.



Another male friendship in the novel is the father-son bond between Amir and his father whom we only know as Baba, a kinship term for 'father'. This relationship between a father and his son itself can be looked at as a theme of the novel. Baba is a well-known rich man in Kabul. He is remembered by people for every possession that he holds as a person, starting from his high built physical appearance to never shying away from extending helping hands to needy to donning the courage of speaking the truth at gunpoint. He also wanted Amir to grow up like him- strong, courageous, and independent. Amir on the other hand, seems to have not inherited any personality trait from his father which makes Baba feel '*there is something missing...*' in him. On one occasion, we even find Baba expressing his disappointment about Amir to his confidant Rahim Khan:

"If I hadn't seen the doctor pull him out of my wife with my own eyes, I'd never believe he's my son."

(The Kite Runner, 22)

This inter-personality difference makes their relationship imperfect and complex which keep Amir emotionally detached from his father. Throughout the novel we find Amir striving for his father's approval and earn the genuine love from the latter. One such occasion comes when Amir wins the kite running competition though the impression does not last for long. Their relationship changes gradually when Afghanistan witnesses the biggest political turmoil in its history. The political instability costs them leave their homeland and move to California. The days in America offer them nothing but compelled to hold on to each other. Amir receives Baba's ultimate approval when he expresses his love for Soraya and requests him to ask for her hands to her father General Iqbal.

The inter-generational bonding between Amir and Rahim Khan is another male friendship that the novel has to offer. Rahim Khan is a close friend of Amir's father in the novel. The generational gap, however, is defied by the trustworthy relationship between the two. Infact, it is Rahim Khan who Provides Amir with the love and support that he often lacked from his father. The former fills the emotional space left by Baba through offering Amir affection and encouragement, particularly regarding his writing aspirations. There are multiple occasions in the novel that Rahim Khan rescued Amir from his emotional crises and constant guilt. One such instance is pushing him to confront his past mistakes and make to an amend regarding his betrayal of Hassan. Again, it is Rahim Khan who ultimately discloses the secret that Hassan was an illegal son of Baba. This revelation plays a crucial role in Amir's journey towards redemption driving him to return to Afghanistan to rescue Sohrab, Hassan's son.



As it is already mentioned Rahim Khan is the closest friend of Baba, Amir's father. He also serves as his business partner and confidant who knows all the secrets of Baba. Rahim Khan and Baba share a long-standing friendship, where Rahim is privy to the personal details of Baba and often voices out for him when needed. Infact, Rahim Khan is the only person who knows about Baba's hidden past, including his illicit affair with Ali's wife Sanaubar and his biological connection to Hassan. Besides their personal connection, they are also involved in business ventures together. Thus, the trusted companionship of Baba and Rahim Khan is an example of male friendship in Hosseini's novel.

The bonding between Ali and Baba is another complex relationship in the novel. Their friendship is parallel to that of Amir and Hassan's on several perspectives. At first, the two of them grew up together and were childhood playmates – at least until polio crippled Ali's leg – just like Hassan and Amir grew up a generation later. Secondly, their bond is deeply impacted by social inequality, with Baba being the privileged Pashtun and Ali the servant-class Hazara. Another uneven point in their friendship turns up as Baba betrayed Ali by having an illicit relationship the latter's wife Sanaubar and has a child named Hassan. Despite the societal obstacles and Baba's infidelity, Ali remains dedicated to him as a servant, never openly confronting him about his actions. This relationship, therefore, is an addition to the theme of friendship between male characters of the novel.

Another example of male friendship is between Baba and Hassan. These two characters share an emotional relationship in the novel. Hassan is a biological son of Baba with the latter's extra-marital affair with his friend cum servant Ali's wife. However, Baba could never disclose the truth and acknowledge Hassan as his son in fear of losing his dignity and social status. Baba being a character of strong demeanour seems to have only one weakness which obviously is unable to give Hassan his true identity. It makes him feel guilty about throughout the novel. Baba, however, never holds back from expressing his love and affection towards Hassan unto the point that it sometimes makes Amir feel jealous. While talking about Baba's love for Hassan, we find Amir recounting once:

“Baba never missed Hassan's birthday. For a while he used to ask Hassan what he wanted, but he gave up doing that because Hassan was always too modest to actually suggest a present. So every winter Baba picked something out himself.” (The Kite Runner, 41)

Another instance of Baba's expression of love for Hassan comes when the latter is treated with his harelip surgery as a birthday gift. Baba even utters how Hassan means to him when Amir asks about replacing their house servant. Baba does not waste any time to confront Amir with his firm statement:



“Hassan’s not going anywhere,...He’s staying right here with us, where he belongs. This is his home and we’re his family. Don’t you ever ask me that question again!” (The Kite Runner, 84)

This statement of Baba indirectly reveals the fact that Hassan was his own son whom he conceived through an extramarital affair with Hassan’s mother, Sanaubar.

The final male friendship in the novel is between Amir and Sohrab. The latter is the son of Hassan. This bond was necessity for Amir to take redemption from the guilt he has been haunted by for years for not defending Hassan from Assef's assault. Right after Rahim Khan tells him who Hassan really was, Amir decides to rescue Sohrab from Afghanistan. The adventurous task of rescue costs Amir upto level that he has to put his dear life itself at stake. The mission required Amir to challenge physical confrontation with Assef which he could never even envision about in his wildest dream. The fight caused multiple injuries on Amir’s body and he has to undergo medical surgery. But, all the suffers seem worthy at last as he could finally adopt Sohrab. The emotional bond with Sohrab seems to bring a change in Amir’s personality trait as well. It earns him the courage to speak the truth and when it should be which would have made Baba proud of his son if he was alive. It occurred when Amir and his wife invite his parents-in-law for dinner. While they were having their meal and chatting about the things, Sohrab is sleeping on a couch. Looking at boy, his father-in-law General sahib asks Amir what he would answer if people ask him about Sohrab’s identity. The question rattles Amir and confronts his father-in-law out rightly:

“You see general Sahib, my father slept with his servant’s wife. She bore him a son named Hassan. Hassan is dead now. The boy sleeping here on the couch is Hassan’s son. He’s my nephew. That’s what you tell people when they ask...And one more thing, General Sahib,...You will never again refer to him as ‘Hazara boy’ in my presence. He has a name and it’s Sohrab.” (The Kite Runner, 331)

This firm statement reveals that Amir has whole heartedly accepted Sohrab as related to his own blood and the relationship marks as a victory of friendship over the evil things that the society has to offer.

3. Conclusion

Khaled Hosseini’s novel, *The Kite Runner* treats its reader with an emotional tale. There are several subject matters beautifully portrayed by the novelist’s craftsmanship at his work. Of those many themes that the story stands upon, the one on the relationship between male characters is a perspective that the



readers can look at the novel through. The complex relationships between Amir and Baba, Ali and Baba, and Hassan and Baba, the trustworthy bonding between Rahim Khan and Baba, inter-generational friendship between Amir and Rahim Khan, all amalgamate at one point. It creates a thought in the mind of the readers that the novel is a celebration of male friendship.

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